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Nahapet Kouchak

A hundred and one hayrens

Yerevan, „Nairi"
1998

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INTRODUCTION

Levon Mkrtchian has written so intelligently and at the same time so pleasantly and so casually about these verses, characterised as Hayrens, that I am compelled to feel a fool in trying to add one word, let alone an Introduction, which as we all know is expected to be an extensive, erudite, systematic, scholarly, charming last word: about *something,* most likely. One thing leads to another. A clever writer soon enough learns that if his subject is coins, he is justified in writing about the sense of smell because Caesar's nose appears on his face stamped on a Roman coin. But a doctor of philosophy or philology, or a professor of poetry, is not expected to be a clever writer, he is only expected to know what he's talking about, and to leave out all irresistible ramblings coming into his head as Caesar's nose invites him to remember Shakespeare's play, which in turn compels him to wonder about the popular theory that Shakespeare did not write Shakespeare's plays, Bacon wrote them. This in turn makes it unavoidable that he say something about English breakfasts,

which are made up of porridge, fruit, tea, bread, fish, mutton, butter, cream, marmalade and ham. Never forgetting however that with ham comes eggs, and if ever nature gave the eye something flawless to behold it is the avian egg, as it has been called. Unbroken, unhatched, a shape of total marvel and purity. But did the egg come first, or did the hen? But even this isn't enough, not by half - for why should it be a bird or a hen, why not a reptile, why not a turtle, for instance? How are we ever going to come to sensible conclusions about love if we can't decide once and for all who wrote Romeo and Juliet? Was it Romeo who was Romeo and in *being* Romeo wrote Romeo and Juliet, or was it Juliet who was Juliet and in that very truth both lived and wrote the sad story of Romeo and Juliet? Or, on the other hand, was it William Shakespeare, and if so, why William? Why not Walter? If it was good enough for Raleigh, Scott, Whitman and Winchell, all of a sudden what right has somebody with a very strange family name to put before it, shaking and spearing, a name other than Walter, *any* name other than Walter? Why William? Is there some hidden connection between *shake* and *spear* and *will* and *iam* that relegates Walter to a position of inferiority? Did he write King Lear, and if so, was he actually who they say he was, with that very name, or was he somebody else, possibly not even English? Did Hamlet, a Dane, perhaps write the sad story of King Lear? Did Hamlet indeed write a line or two of verse to Ophelia? Did he write a letter to the gas company about an overcharge? Did he ever stop in the middle of a soliloquy and ask heaven, What am I talking about? I've got an introduction to write.

Levon Mkrtchian is both an erudite scholar - erudite twice

in two minutes? it is not allowed, it is against the law of language, it is a misdemeanor of the third order, the punishment for which is not jeers from other members of the family but silent glances from total strangers sitting quietly somewhere and for some reason trying to read about somebody named Nahapet Kuchak[1]. Well, of course we know - but wait a minute. What about Levon Mkrtchian is both an erudite scholar and a delightful man in the street, a comic teller of sad stories that are hilarious, and a beloved teacher at the University of Yerevan? What about *that*? Well, *that* about *that*, then, and on with the dance. And so now again we can move along to: Well, of course we know there was no such person as Nahapet Kuchak. There were two such, that is. And in Yerevan in October of 1978 I was told by several informative gossipmongers that what we have here is a case of something a good deal more confusing than mistaken identity. I was told that a manuscript fell into the hands of a rich merchant who decided to put his name on the manuscript, and his name was Nahapet Kuchak. I was not told that this rich merchant rubbed out another name, the name of the writer of the hayrens, the poems, in the manuscript, and I therefore presumed that the manuscript had no name upon it. The manuscript was anonymous, and consequently it could very well be the work of not one, not two, not three poets' but the work of dozens of them, and not from one place and time but from dozens of places and times. If scholarship is to put such simplicity into a neat straight line, or to surround such confusion with the shape and form of the egg, with yolk and white, and the mystery of what

[1]Pronounced Koo-chahk (editor).

is to hatch from it, hawk or turtle, all I can say is bravo, scholarship. Thus, I take this opportunity now to say bravo, Levon, or to put it into the current mode and preference of Yerevan, hoorah, hoorah, hoorah, Levon Mkrtchian, thou laughing wise man.

The only thing we are able not to dispute is that there is a body of writing in the form of poems, called hayrens, and skillfully described by the translator Ewald Osers - who seems to have done an impossible job with great tact and a certain elegance that I am profoundly grateful for, because although I speak the Bitlis dialect of Armenian, which I learned in the bosom of my family in Fresno, California, starting after the age of eight when I arrived there from an American Wasp orphanage - wasp means white anglo-saxon person, or is the p for presumption? - learned that glorious language in well under two weeks for the simple reason that nobody in the family above the age of eighteen spoke English, the only language until then that I knew at all, although they spoke fluent and eloquent Kurdish, and Turkish, as well as Armenian - although all *that*, I do not read Armenian, I went only one day to Armenian School and learned only the letters for the word *ahha*, which may very well be English, too, anyway, for in each language the word is pronounced precisely the same. And so, had not Ewald Osers undertaken to translate Kuchak into English I would not be able to pore of his verses and to puzzle about them, and about himself, and especially about his girls and women - he seems to have adored them all, and indiscriminately, almost. Whereas our experience, may I presume to speak for at least three or four Englishmen and Americans, has been that even the girls and women that we most adored were really - how shall we put this? - just slightly beside themselves, so to put it: they were observers, and they were observing us, as well as themselves, and their performances as the embodiments of our illusions, fantasies, inventions, creations, and all-around tomfoolishness as a consequence of being touched by the sweet differences of them from us? Well, of course you're supposed to take lyric poetry, love songs, at face value, as the saying is, and not let your mind wander past the limits of the form - eight lines, stress at center, rhyme at end. It's not supposed to be any of your business who Kuchak was and who, precisely, his girls and women were, and it is simple rudeness on the part of any reader to suspect that the poet was very probably leaving the best poetry possible at the time and under the circumstances totally uncommitted to words, unwritten, and possibly even unthought. It's too complicated to notice that when you and the girl with the apples are clutched together and writhing with what somebody has called the imbecile's single-mindedness, and then are once again safe and serene in one another's arms, it is too complicated to notice the poet is idly thinking, I think she was thinking of somebody else, but who? And the girl, pressing her lips upon his neck whispers, Will you buy me a blue dress for the Fair tomorrow - you are so good, so sweet, so great. This informs the poet that there is here an unmistakable element of barter, of buying and selling, which deserves some thought - but no, no, the hell with it, it would wreck the rhyme. Besides, wasn't there a girl once who *didn't* ask for something? Yes, there was, but it turned out that she threatened to kill herself if he tried to throw her over - in favor of who? Who is it you believe is worthy of your silly scribblings?

If ever a writer was inappropriate for the writing of an

Introduction to a translation of Nahapet Kuchak from Armenian to English, it was, it is myself, so then what's *this* all about? Why am I trying to write something? Well, you see, it goes back a long way. I could explain it, perhaps, or half-explain it, but as we have already noticed it might become entangled in a variety of things that could seem irrelevant, but let me try, let me try, as the saying is, and indeed as Levon Mkrtchian himself is given to putting things - saying them twice. Let me try, let me try.

I went to Soviet Armenia on the first money I earned as a writer, in May of the year 1935, so that going out to the ruins of Zvartnots, one of the great examples of Armenian church architecture, I could look in the direction of Bitlis, in the highlands of Armenia. I did this because although born in California I had a hankering, I had a longing, I had a compulsion to draw near, at the age of 26, to where my people had lived, apparently for centuries. They were certainly there until 1905 when my father Armenak set out alone for New York, to be followed a year later by my mother Takoohi, and my two sisters, and my brother, all in a group, surrounded by other groups of Saroyans both in Bitlis and in California, a large family, and in a certain sense crowded with poets and preachers, some of them not unlike Kuchak, or Narek, that lunatic of love (of God, of perfection). I felt I ought to see the territory, as the saying is. Why do we have this variety among us, girl-lovers like Kuchak, and God-lovers like Narek? Priests, preachers, barbers, shoemakers, vineyardists, money-makers, loud-mouths, and all-around hustlers? All-around campaigners for improvement, elevation and enrichment, if I may. That 1935 visit came after I had published my first book, which had been a big success both in the market-place and in the

sanctimonious and official literary world, so to put it. Everybody in Soviet Armenia was Armenian, and this was something I needed to experience first-hand, for I had begun to suspect long ago that there is something fishy, shall we say, about *race*? Something that tends quickly to *racism*, especially if you insist. Or to put it another way, especially if *others* insist. I had always been pleased to be who I was, but I began to notice in Fresno that Armenians were considered by the local "Americans" to be less than the local Americans. This bugged me because it was untrue. Some Armenians were less than some local "Americans" but most Armenians seemed to me to be at least equal to all Americans everywhere, while other Armenians were superior to most Americans. In short, absolute nonsense, for if the truth were told, and that was my business, they were all the same, all of them. And so in walking the streets of Yerevan in 1935 I noticed with great reluctance that these people were the same people I knew in Fresno, in San Francisco, in New York - of *all* races. But before I left Yerevan to find my way back to California, it came to me, just the same, that no, sir, the Armenians are Armenians, and *different*, and I *chose* right then and there to identify their difference as a collective superiority. Based on what? Based on madness, and a kind of recognition of a simple hitherto concealed truth: Armenians are literate. That's it. They read and write. Whoever learns to read, immediately begins to write - letters, at the very least. Next, poems. Hundreds of millions of poems are written every year in Soviet Armenia. Kuchak didn't start it, but the enormity of his talent certainly didn't stop it, either, by making the people feel they couldn't write that well, so why write at all? Armenian literacy is modest. Some poets don't mind if their manuscripts are not

read by more than a few members of the family, and *never* published.

Is it a good thing for a whole nation of three million souls to be writers of poems? It is awful, it is magnificent, it is unbelievable, but at the same time this phenomenon calls for the attention of expert scholarship, of the kind that is most effectively exemplified and demonstrated in Levon Mkrtchian. And so when he himself did me the honor of inviting me, asking me to write an Introduction to this book, I thought, No, this is not my territory at all, but perhaps that is all the more reason I ought give it a go. And so I didn't refuse. Now, the theory is that an Introduction by me would help sell the book. It is a false theory. Any Introduction, by Jesus, by God, by the Holy Ghost, by the Spirit of Nahapet Kuchak himself, would *not* help sell his book of poems in England and America - or for that matter any book of poems by any Armenian, any Englishman, any American, or anybody of any kind, anywhere, with an Introduction by a King, a President, or a Billionaire. I buy such books in my neighborhood of Paris for 50 centimes, or 12 cents, all the time.

The scholarship of Levon Mkrtchian is everlasting, thank God. The translating by Ewald Osers is heroic, thank God.

Nahapet Kuchak is here to stay, now also in English, thank God.

The rest is irrelevant, but at least in the spirit of fun and truth.

WILLIAM SAROYAN

ABOUT HIMSELF, ABOUT A BELOVED WOMAN - ABOUT EVERYTHING

Nahapet Kuchak's hayrens[1] were popular in medieval Armenia. The hayrens were sung:

Sing me one of the many hayrens
that you know so well by heart.
Sing of our own day, of people
now living ...[2]

Quite a few centuries have passed since these hayrens were composed. But the songs of those distant days and of the people of those days still strike a resonant chord in our hearts. A great deal has changed in the world. Man himself has changed. But, much as they may have changed, man and the world are still the same. We have seen man walk on the moon. But this does not in any way diminish the "poetry of the moon". "As before, the dreams of birds among the

[1]**Hayren:** a poem consisting, as a rule, of four lines of fifteen syllables. Each line divides into two half-lines of seven and eight syllables (with stresses, in the first half-line, on the 2nd, 5th and 7th syllables, and, in the second half-line, on the 3rd, 5th and 8th syllables). In some editions the hayrens are printed as quatrains - each line of two half-lines making up one long line, while in others they are set out as eight-line verses, with each half-line occupying a line of its own. (In most of the ancient manuscripts the hayrens are not divided into lines at all.) Russian translators, accordingly, have treated hayrens variously as fourline or eight-line poems.

[2]The hayrens pre quoted in translation by Ewald Osers to whom I would like, on this occasion, to express my sincere gratitude.

branches seep into the moon's still sad lights" (Paul Verlaine). Besides, the eternal themes of art - love with its great joys and great pains; unfeeling, murderous incomprehension; envy and vileness have assumed an even sharper edge in our contemporary world, for contemporary men. And the very complexity and richness of mind of the contemporary reader render him especially receptive to literature, or - if you like - vulnerable.

◆

Today the great old masters seem particularly close to us. The great lyrical poetry of Nahapet Kuchak is close to us. He wrote about himself, about the woman he loved - about everything.

We have virtually no detailed or reliable information on Nahapet Kuchak's life. For a long time it used to be believed that the author of the hayrens Nahapet Kuchak was the same Kuchak who lived in the 16th century in the village of Kharakonis near Van. That belief gained widespread currency chiefly because most of the hayrens came down to us in manuscripts of the 16th century - although some hayrens are encountered also in much earlier manuscripts. However, in Bryusov's anthology "The Poetry of Armenia" (1916) it was already pointed out that the author of the hayrens was another Nahapet Kuchak - not the one who lived at Kharakonis. "It is now established," Valeriy Bryusov wrote, "that the original Kuchak has nothing in common except his name with the poet Kuchak who lived in the Van district in the early 16th century; our Nahapet Kuchak would seem to be a native of the neighbourhood of Akina (Egina) considering that his verses - in their language, in their structure, and in specific expressions - are reminiscent of the folksongs of that locality."[1]

Subsequently, in 1927 - 28, Manuk Abeghian published his research "The Ancient Gusan Folksongs", in which he proved that the hayrens were composed by gusans, i. e. folk singers, and not in

[1] "Poeziya Armenii", Moscow, 1916, p. 55.

the 16th century but earlier[1]. And present-day scholars such as L. Khachikian and A. Mnatsakanian believe that a more correct dating of the hayrens assigns them to the 13th/14th centuries. They show in their work how easy it is to explain the hayrens, and the ideas expressed in them, in terms of just those centuries and how difficult it would be, without strained interpretation, to relate them to a later period[2]. Nevertheless, with rare exceptions, the hayrens continue to be published in Armenian, in Russian, and in foreign languages as the poetry of Nahapet Kuchak from Kharakonis. This is not simply due to the force of tradition or to indolence. In spite of the closeness of the hayrens to folklore, it is difficult to relate them to folksongs, to assign them to the general stream of oral creativity. The stylistic and thematic erudition of the hayrens proves that one particular poet has here carried this ancient form of poetry - encountered even in the l0th century with Narekatsi - to perfection. The need to provide these hayrens with an author was so great that chronological discrepancies and miscalculations were frequently disregarded.

The hayrens bear the imprint of one author's individuality and that is why the name originally associated with them has stuck to them. The most famous Armenian poets - Hovhannes Tumanian, Avetik Isahakian, Yeghishe Charents - have written about Kuchak as a great lyric poet.

They invariably emphasized that the hayrens were the products of individual creativity:

[1] Manuk Abeghian, Works, Vol. 2, Yerevan, Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR, 1967, pp. 9 - 280 (in Armenian).

[2] A. Mnatsakanian, On Hayrens and Nahapet Kuchak, in: "Istoriko-filologicheskiy zhurnal", 1958, No. 2, pp. 234 - 257 (in Armenian); L. Khachikian; Rules of the 'Brotherhood' of the City of Yerzinka (1280), in: "Vestnik Matenadarana", Yerevan, 1962, No. 6, pp. 365 - 371 (in Armenian).

Narekatsi and Kuchak - what other dominating minds like these!
In all the world no mountain peaks can match the beauty of Masis!

- wrote Yeghishe Charents in a remarkable poem "The Tongue of My Armenia..."

We do not know the author of the hayrens, we do not know his biography, but we do know his verses (what he wrote has survived, hence the most important thing has survived) - and we are able to say that such a poet lived. (Besides, are there not many other medieval poets whose names and biographies are unknown to us?) We can therefore assume that Nahapet Kuchak was that poet. Though he was not that Kuchak from Kharakonis, who lived in the 16th century, he was a Nahapet Kuchak, a name, the label of authorship.

From the hayrens we can only conjecture what kind of man Kuchak was and what his life was like, "I can picture him as a learned man, bending over ancient books and manuscripts, seeing how kingdoms rose and fell, and the people remained the creators, and the human spirit shone forth like the stars over the farmland, - wrote Kaisyn Kuliyev, - I can visualize Kuchak as a stonemason-philosopher who has understood the language and the stone he has hewn, who loves its unsubmissiveness and eternity. I can visualize him also as a monk who in his old age, after many years behind monastery walls, beguiled his evenings and passed sleepless nights in thoughts about the bitter fate of his people, composing poems full of grief and of faith in the immortality of his nation. And when at dawn he walked out of his cell into the courtyard he rejoiced in seeing the blue sky over the church and in seeing the mountains hanging as a white miracle above his native land.

According to legend he was a gardener. That is quite possible. But what is important is that he was a poet."[1]

[1]Kaisyn Kuliyev, Nahapet Kuchak - A Great Lyrical Poet, in the collection; Nahapet Kuchak. Lyrical Poems, "Khudozhestvennaya literatura" Publishing House, Moscow, 1972, pp. 14 - 15.

Finally, it would be a mistake to get sidetracked excessively by the arguments about Kuchak's identity and to forget what really matters - the poetry, the hayrens.

◆

Kuchak's hayrens reflect the main feature of the Renaissance period: a sense of the fullness of life, of the fullness of the perception of the beauty of the world.

The majority of Kuchak's hayrens that have come down to us are poems about love - a love free from the canons of domesticity, a love which knows but one authority, the authority of the heart. "The kind of love that's bought and sold merits burning at the stake" one of the hayrens says. "He who accuses a man in love deserves hatred" says another. "Pointless to play with love if the bond's sealed by force", the hero consoles himself after his beloved has left him. Love tolerates no rule of force. As early as the fifth century the Armenian scholar and Catholicos Sahak Partev commanded his priests: "And you, priests, do not bless the marriage of those not yet of age before they come of age, and likewise do not venture to marry such as are of age but have not, of their own volition, seen one another, and also do not venture to marry them without inquiring and asking themselves; for perhaps they gave their consent because of their parents' will against their own; and do not venture to bless such marriages, for to this day such malpractices have led only to misery, both spiritual and corporeal."[1]

From Partev's words, which do honour this leading figure of the Early Middle Ages, some scholars have drawn the (entirely logical) conclusion that in 5th century Armenia it was not an infrequent thing for minors to be married or for marriages to be concluded not on the basis of love but by parental decision. But it is far more important

[1]Armyanskaya kniga kanonov" (Armenian Book of Canons), Ed. V. Hakopian, Yerevan, Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR, 1964, p. 382 (in Armenian).

(and just as logical) to emphasize that, at that distant time, such marriages were already being forbidden. But even in Kuchak's day far from everybody understood love in the same way as the poet. There was also a bourgeois environment, there was gossip and there were whispers, there was spiteful scandal-mongering, there were slanders and lies. The hero of one of the hayrens visits the house of his beloved and hears the joist maliciously nudging the rafter: "There's a man who's in love!", angrily he remarks: "That tree grew in the forest where did it learn to tell tales?" Another hayren speaks of lovers having fled from wicked people; now they are free from censorious glances and human gossip, now they are free to love.

◆

Kuchak's hayrens might be called a dialogue between two lovers. But, as Nafi Dzhusoyty has correctly observed, "all the time there is a third person present, some shadowy spy. Even in his passionate hastening towards his love, Kuchak never forgets him, he argues with him, he curses him, he makes fun of him and he mocks him, he upbraids him bitterly or in a manly voice, aware that it is impossible to resist that force."[1] That third presence, cursed by all those in love, is perpetually there in the improper role of the fellow-traveller of the lovers. Philosophically his presence may even be justified but in human terms his role is incomprehensible.

Kuchak's poetry signals the triumph of the lofty principles of love according to its own will, according to the commands of the heart. Even the priests (of whom Kuchak writes with an ironic smile) cannot stand up to the "witchcraft of love".

In one of his hayrens the hero reproaches his uncompliant beauty: "You too must die and leave this world: your flesh will wither on your arms, your breasts will be the maggots' prey. Keep me no longer

[1]N. Dzhusoyty, Svet cherez veka (The Light Through the Ages), "Druzhba narodov", 1969, No. 2, p. 272.

from your charms!" Love that knows no hypocritical prohibitions - that is the main theme of the hayrens. "Kuchak is undisguisedly sensual", - writes S. Rassadin. "He is frequently immodest and even playful in his sensuality. He is simply consumed by it: he only has to glimpse some washing on a line, and among the washing a girl's chemise - and immediately he thinks of its owner. There is no pleasurable simile for the female breast that Kuchak has not thought of: this seems to be the object of his particular desire. Again, the dead are awakened not by the picture of love 'in general', not by some symbol of the 'eternal feminine', but by the flash of female breasts, by the picture of skin."[1] In Kuchak's hayrens love of the woman is pure through its very directness, its outspokenness, its (as it were) baring of feelings.

Yet his freedom of feelings does not become licence, or their vigour courseness. There is in the hayrens a certain chaste restraint. There is a lot of tenderness in them, a lot of good-humoured and sly folk humour. At times even the most outspoken confessions are immediately softened by a smile.

◆

The love hayrens are devoid of monotony. They are rich in their range of tone, their contents, their nuances of thoughts and feelings. And that, as the great 9th century Kashmiri scholar Anandavardkhana observed, is the criterion of the individuality and novelty of a poet: "The road of poetry, which might seem to have been marked out by thousands - nay, an infinite number - of poets, who have trodden it in every possible way, once again reveals itself as having no end".[2] The hayrens are songs of passionate, unex-

[1]S. Rassadin, Neistovyy Kuchak (The Outrageous Kuchak), "Literaturnaya Armeniya", 1973, No. 3, p. 79.

[2]Anandavardkhana, "Dkhvanyaloka", Nauka Publishing House, Moscow:, 1974, p. 192.

pected and whimsical declarations of love. They are poems about the great beauty of woman and the great beauty of the world. And the world is not just beautiful. The world is more than beautiful because woman is more than beautiful.

Nature reveals itself to man, it becomes visible to him, when he is in love. In effect, seeing people are people in love:

Regard my love: all dressed in green,
her frock is like the spring,
Buttons and ribbons are all green,
no other colour to be seen.
I took her out into the woods:
a stream was tumbling down between
Green banks and all around the trees
arrayed in leaves of vernal green.

Kuchak painted landscape full of feeling; he was very much a painter. Nature is alive in his verses as it is on the canvases of the masters of the Renaissance. Nature is not merely a background in the hayrens. Just as in Giorgione's "Venus Asleep" nature and woman are fused into one: all is nature.

Love is life itself, the triumph and the meaning of life. And Kuchak's songs of love are songs of life. Happy, a thousand times happy, is the man in love:

Envy me more today than ever,
than any other day:
My lover has come to visit me -
envy me all the way!

Surely the lines about this wonderful moment, a moment arrested in time, are written with the confident, bold and self-oblivious hand of an artist:

White-breasted maid in your full skirt,
I touched your breasts today,
Your delicate arms, I clasped you tight
and, stunned, I drew away.
With folded hands I said this prayer;
"O Lord, send me death's rest,
As beauty's victim let me die
upon this maiden's breast."

There is an astonishing grief, an autumnal sadness in the lines of the man who now has to live without the woman he loves:

While you were mine
the trees were in bloom.
Now you are gone
all is winter and gloom.

And how much pain, how much anger is there in the lines about a love affair which people would not accept:

Whom do we hurt by being lovers?
What do these people want with us?
Wherever I go they point their fingers:
"That's him", they say and then berate you
(As if we two were murderers)
and say: "Your punishments await you!"

◆

Love, the exaltation of the joys of love and wine in his hayrens is no proof that Kuchak, as assumed by some researchers of his poetry, wrote his poetry to give pleasure to the powerful of this world. In the Middle Ages the sentiment of love was a cult of a particular kind, widespread among the working people, in particular among the artisans. "What then am I to say in censure of the women!", says the

11th century Armenian historian Aristakes Lastivertsi, describing one of the towns of medieval Armenia. "Sufficient has been said by Isaiah, and there is no need for our words. For just as he accused the women of Jerusalem for their shameless indulgence in adornments, saying that 'the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks"[1]. Many of the hayrens draw a picture of urban life, life sinful from the point of view of accepted medieval moral standard. As for Lastivertsi, he accused the women in the belief that they were to blame for the hardships and misfortunes visited upon Armenia. Urban conditions resulted in the break-down of the old moral rule which had been very rigid and in force for many centuries.

And not only in the houses of the wealthy, but also where abundance was unknown, people praised wine, the beauty of women, and the beauty of their apparel.

Needless to say, the cult of love did not reflect a carefree lighthearted life. Even love itself is, in many of Kuchak's hayrens, the source of pain and suffering, and unrequited love does not so much crystallize emotions as it brings torment.

Love is like death, we read in one of the hayrens. Frequently love is likened to fire, searing the heart and soul.

The tranquil and leisurely mirroring of life that is found in some medieval poets is not a characteristic of the hayrens. They are marked by a mood of restlessness.

A major cycle of the hayrens deals with itinerant men. Kuchak's verses about roaming men who have left their country, or been driven from it into foreign parts, are full of the grief of loneliness, and of the torturing loneliness of women and mothers. Kuchak writes about the bitter life of the rover with a deep, heart-breaking pain and with fervent sympathetic understanding.

[1]"Povestvovanie" Aristakesa Lastivertsi", Nauka Publishing House, Moscow, 1968, p. 92.

◆

Kuchak frequently uses popular language and the motifs and images of folk poetry.

In Armenia it was customary to give an apple as a token of love. This custom was reflected in hayrens, in the epic "David of Sasun", and in songs. In one folksong the apple-tree speaks: "I am a symbol of love, a symbol of the heart; neither the rose nor the lily can compare with me, I am beyond compare..." The apple is a personification of the reciprocity of feelings, chastity and purity.

The apple is even more a traditional image than, for instance, the rose. According to Biblical tradition God forbade Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and Evil. Although the fruit itself is not named in the Bible, it has been assumed since ancient times that it was an apple. But the rose, in particular, became the favourite image of the medieval poetry of the East - a favourite image but soon (in the poetry of the imitators and late followers) an outworn one. "The rose - that nuisance of Eastern poets..." in a whole number of Kuchak's hayrens the apple holds the place of the rose in traditional poetry ("Your breasts are like a stall in Egypt, the apples of your breasts are like velvet from Yezed..."; "My rosy apple, the time has come to pluck you..."; "I am sick with love of you, take your apples and come to me..."; "All the year, all twelve months the apple was going bad, I travelled through all villages, all cities, but no one knew how to heal the apple..."; "You are an apple on the bough, I am a green leaf on it; I fear when autumn comes they will pick you..."). There are some hayrens in which both images are found side by side - apples and roses: "A red rose you are with a green stem; a green twig with a red apple...". And there are, of course, hayrens wholly constructed on the traditional image of the rose:

I awoke in the morning
to call on my love.
She came out to meet me:
a rose hugged by leaves.

The rose, too, is beautiful
when touched by the morning sun:
It takes off its green clothes,
puts its scarlet robe on.

Does one have to say that these are beautiful lines? They are not oversweet or cloying. Kuchak's rose is not one of those "eastern" roses of which Arseniy Tarkovskiy so appropriately observed:

O roses of saccharine fragrance,
The nightingale's heart-rending call -
O perfumed oriental translations,
What a headache you've given us all!

The language of the hayrens is simple, Kuchak has happily avoided the abundance of images that is so generously scattered about the verses of many medieval poets from the 13th to the 17th century. The hayrens are as simple and perfect as the ancient churches of Armenia, and just as laconic.

Kuchak husbanded his words like bread.

LEVON MKRTCHIAN

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

These translations owe their existence to the infectious enthusiasm of Professor Levon Mkrtchian. They are based, in order of importance, on (1) Levon Mkrtchian's literal interlinear translations into Russian, (2) Russian verse translations by various hands, (3) the Armenian originals which, even though I cannot read them, showed me the rhyme scheme. I have also had some of the poems read to me to get an idea of their music.

I did not approach my task with any theoretical preconceptions: I simply allowed the poetry to speak to me. Inevitably, I fell in love with Kuchak's hayrens, with their delightful blend of passion, tenderness and gentle humour. Here, I felt, was a poet who was entirely serious about his feelings and his poetry but who did not take himself too seriously. Across the centuries and across the whole length of a continent this was a voice that could be reproduced for an English language audience of the present day.

All translation of poetry is a continuous weighing up of gain and loss, a continuous compromise. I want to make it clear, however, that my first loyalty was to the text: I have stuck very closely to the words of the original, leaving out hardly anything and adding even less.

At the same time, I have endeavoured to preserve the structure, the texture, the melody, the flavour and the fra-

grance of the originals.

The translations had to be English poems in their own right while, at the same time, continuing to be Armenian poems. There had to be some loosening up of the elaborate metre-and-rhyme scheme - but I hope that the forms by which I have rendered the originals will be found to be "functionally equivalent" for the contemporary English or American ear. If I have occasionally varied the formal structure, then this was done partly because I felt - as indeed some of the Russian poetic translators did - that 101 times the identical rhythmic form might seem a little monotonous to the modern ear, but partly, or mainly, because the tone or mood of the poems themselves seemed to dictate certain variations in form. But then, as the English proverb has it, "the proof of pudding is in the eating".

I greatly enjoyed the work; others will have to judge its success.

EWALD OSERS

1.

Happy the man who took his girl
and fled the gaping throng.
They crossed the bridge: the waters swirled
and bore the bridge along.
The snow came down, the wind blew strong:
their tracks were soon erased.
He took her to the garden maze
and kissed her all day long.

2

While you were mine
the trees were in bloom.
Now you are gone
all is winter and gloom.
Come back to me,
let us be as before:
I'll be your sun
and the snows shall thaw!

3

Where are you from? Whence have you come,
O fairer than the rose?
You came and settled in my soul
and gone is my repose.
You've lost your way inside my heart,
you stir its hopes and fears;
You can't escape: you've stunned my head
and now flows in my tears.

4

In this our world
two things deserve our tears:
The man who is in love
and he whom Death has taken.
The dead man in his grave
no longer needs your sympathy.
Behold me in my misery:
I'm neither dead nor alive.

5

Your eyes: the deep blue sea,
your brows: the clouds at night.
Your cheeks and face are aglow-
and rose-petal-bright.
Wherever you go
no need for candle-light.
The shimmer of your breasts
brings the dead back to life.

6

A partridge, friends, cannot be tamed?
    Do not believe the tale you've heard.
I saw one only yesterday
    and envy him who owns that bird.
Her eyebrows a thin charcoal trace
    and sugar-sweet her lips so red.
If she embraced a man stone-dead
    he'd come to life in her embrace.

7

O silvery Moon, your boast is bold:
    "I give the world serenity".
Yet in my arms an earthly moon I hold,
    she's lying cheek to cheek with me.
You don't believe me? Let me lift a fold
    of my black cassock. But I fear you might
Yourself be overcome by love for her
    and give our world a feebler light.

8

What can I do? As soon as I set eyes
upon a beauty I'm aflame with love.
When I have grasped the laws of stars and skies
I'll put my arms round my delightful dove,
Show her to God and argue with Him thus:
Thou, Lord, hast made the beauty that here stands-
Why shouldst Thou turn Thy wrath upon my head
because I love the product of Thy hands?

9

The Moon rose up above the mountain
with its bright star together.
I embraced my beloved and with passion
kissed her on both cheeks together.
And God commanded from above:
Take care you do not lose your love,
For under the Moon I did not fashion
two such peerless beauties together.

10

Away from you I'm like a child
snatched from his mother's breast:
An orphan in a hostile world,
unloved and uncaressed.
Oh give my thirsting heart a cooling drink,
my love for you has set me all on fire.
Grant me a single word of hope:
I am parched with desire.

11

Not like the other birds was I
who pecked up grain from the ground.
My wings were spread high in the sky
to evade love's cruel slings.
The nets were set up on the shore:
Alas, then came my fall.
The others were trapped by their feet
but I - feet, wings and all.

12

Go away. I do not need you
and weary is my heart:
It has grown cold and loveless,
pierced by your dart.
If you became a spring,
the only one in the world,
I'd rather die of thirst than drink
a single drop.

13

When I was young and innocent
they called me a golden boy.
I grew up, fell in love, and gone
are my colour and my joy.
Young men, beware: love is stronger than rock,
take heed of my appeal:
To keep love out you need iron-clad stone
and shutters made of steel.

14

For the Creator's sake
stop your eyebrows' play!
The daggers of your eyes,
how cruelly they slay!
For your life's sake
don't make me your prey:
I'm too young to die,
not yet for the stake!

15

I am the eye, you are the light, my love.
Blind without light is the eye.
I am a fish, the water you, my love.
Without water fish must die.
If you pull a fish from the river
and throw it in another it will live -
but if I am parted from you
I'll die without hope of reprieve.

16

I blush at our love
like the sunset glow.
Our quilty secret
all people know.
My wicked eyes
seek you all the while
with tears of longing:
no one else to beguile.

17

Do not put on your sky-blue dress,
do not bewitch me with your hands.
Don't leave your house. I'm jealous, yes,
that you might smile at other men.
Your father did a lot of good,
built bridges over gorge and canyon.
Why don't you do just one good deed
and let me be your bed companion?

18

Your cheeks are white and rose-red:
    my pulses they arouse.
You sit at the feast, conversing
    with me with your charcoaled brows.
You undo the buttons revealing
    a pair of white doves in their nest.
I fear you might rise and leave me
    all yearning for your breast.

19

What shall I do? My lover is away
    with no one to talk to about him.
Yet I can't keep silent about him
    even for a single hour.
I thirst for his love
    as a summer flower for rain:
it searches the sky above
    and prays for a single drop.

20

Like a leaf in autumn
my love-lorn heart shakes;
like spring rains my tears are
running down my cheeks.
My soul's left my body.
In your arms let me lie!
I've got used to your embraces -
What other home have I?

21

I planted my garden with saplings
and lavished on them every care.
I watered and tended my saplings -
They've taken them, and I despair.
I roam the woods like a partridge
whose chicks are gone from under her wings.
I heard you possessed some bird snares:
set them up - I'll be caught in your slings!

22

I am leaving. I am not staying -
no place shall hold me for ever.
To the land of the Greeks I am going,
an exile, to return never.
If they come and tell you where I am
I'll be far, and go farther from home.
If they come and tell me where you are
if I'm in chains I'll break them and come!

23

Arise and step forth from your house
and make the morning proud.
The bright flash of your breasts is as
spring lightning from the cloud.
For love of you many a holy man
has broken his sacred vows:
I too have fallen in love with you
and left my father's house.

24

Like incense has my colour turned,
    like saffron is my sickly hue:
Am I at the hour of death
    or is it all from love of you?
I'm told you have a wonder cure:
    make me revive, sweet sorceress,
for if I die from love of you
    you'll be arraigned a murderess.

25

You confidently promiced me:
    "My breast shall always be your slave!"
You've changed your mind. Who turned your heart?
    Who was the unconscionable knave?
The thought is painful that another
    caresses you where I caressed,
his kisses where mine left their traces,
    his lips now burning on your breast.

26

Jet-black your eyes, raven your brows,
rosy your cheeks, your forehead wide.
And shimmering white your apple-breasts
which, foolishly, you wish to hide.
You too must die and leave this world:
your flesh will wither on your arms,
your breasts will be the maggots' prey -
Keep me no longer from your charms!

27

I went and visited you:
you did not wish to kiss me;
I had hoped you would welcome me,
you did not seem to miss me.
Do not weep, have no sorrow.
don't make a year out of your day
the feet that brought me: on the morrow
they will take me away!

28

A hundred times I've said to you:
Oh, make my love a gorgeous gown,
the outside from the golden sun,
the lining from the silver moon.
For padding use the lowering clouds,
the thread draw from the shimmering sea,
for buttons use the sparkling stars
and for the buttonholes - take me!

29

One foolish error have I made:
a viper's daughter holds my heart.
My love I gave her trustingly
and from her poison now I smart.
The viper's mother heard my plaint
but neither hope nor solace gave.
I am to blame for all my pain:
Whoever had a viper's love?

30

My love, I searched the whole wide world
- there's not a place I have not been -
to find a girl, a lovely girl,
who never was another's queen.
Alas, I fell in love with one
whom others loved, and left her then.
Why have I suffered all this time
if you have lain with other men?

31

You're like a pearl strung on a string
from your toes up you're flame and fire.
Oh, if it but consumed your mother
who gave that jewel unto another!
If in the land of Greeks and of Armenians
justice prevailed to settle legal strife,
I'd face the learned judge and plead for you
and would not let you be another's wife.

32

With your snow-white breast
wear a shirt of blue,
leave a button undone -
men go mad for you.
I'll ask God to ordain
a ban on that hue -
then you won't wear blue
and drive men insane.

33

As I walked down the street I saw
a candle wreathed in mourning fashion
and by it lay the lifeless body
of a young lover dead from passion.
The candle - strange to tell - began to sing
and burning tears deep from its heart did spring:
"This man of unrequited love lies dead,
its fire lit the flame above my head."

34

The envious old gossips
would like to see me dead.
But I committed no crime: I
just loved where my fancy led.
I don't care if my conduct offends them,
I can choose what I wish to do.
Once more their tongues are busy -
because I want that man too.

35

Come here and listen to my counsel:
Let's close our ears to all that fuss.
Whom do we hurt by being lovers?
What do these people want with us?
Wherever I go they point their fingers:
"That's him," they say and then berate you
(as if we two were murderers)
and say: "Your punishments await you!"

36

Before break of day
I climbed on your roof.
I put down my head
and soon fell asleep.
Said the joist to the rafter.
"There's a man who's in love".
As long as I live
I've never met an informer-tree:
That tree grew in the forest
Where did it learn to tell tales?

37

My heart has broken up and spilled
and put its content up for sale.
Come, dearest, come and make a bid;
name a good price - for if you fail
to make a purchase, look some other man
might buy my treasures, knowing not their worth -
So talk and haggle, buy each little thing,
so no one else can own me on this earth.

38

I see the light of my eyes
in another man's company,
embracing him, complaining
of other men's infamy.
My heart sternly bids me:
"Part - no remorse!
Pointless to play with love
if the bond's sealed by force."

39

As I walked down the little winding streets
I met my love coming the other way.
She greeted me demurely, eyes cast down
but I had missed her sorely many a day
and now fell round her neck and kissed her hard
on lips and cheeks, but she began
to cry: "How can you shame me so
in daylight and in front of everyone?"

40

My darling love, let us suffer no longer
    my love for you disrupts my inward peace.
Let's leave together for another country;
    this country holds no happiness for us.
Let's go away and stay in happier regions,
    where we can live together without fear.
Why should we stay here, trembling and uncertain
    what blow of fate will next befall us here?

41

O prophet David, hear my prayer,
    forgive my sins: you are wise.
I love a beautiful young girl
    as I love the light of my eyes.
If such a girl came to your cell
    - so beautiful a sight -
you'd let her in, read psalms by day
    and lie with her by night.

42

As I walked down the street at night
half sober and half drunk,
I met my love: her breasts shone white
like apples on a tree.
I hailed her, I reached out for her.
"The branches too?" she called.
I only picked the fruit, I swear;
I used no force at all.

43

But yesterday, on a fine day,
I saw a girl led off by stealth,
snatched from her lover ruthlessly,
by force or by the lure of wealth.
The kind of love that's bought and sold
merits burning at the stake:
True love is a sweet heavenly gift
of apples and of sugar-cake.

44

My love, I did not speak an evil word
of you. So don't be angry any more!
Some mischief-maker must have come between
us two, to try to set our hearts at war.
A mischief-maker not unlike that serpent
who was the cause of mankind's fall from grace,
deceiving Adam who was robed in light-rays,
and drove him from that Paradisial place.

45

The sun was brilliant in the sky,
the birds were chirruping their tunes:
I met a beautiful young maiden
like to a thousand smiling moons.
"I love you," I burst out to her -
but she retorted with a pout:
"If you love me, keep it secret.
Never bruit your love about!"

46

My heart of hearts came from the bath
in all her beautiful attire.
I went to greet her in the street,
a narrow bustling thoroughfare.
She raised the corner of her veil
and whispered with a glance of fire:
"Go now away. But come at night:
much can be done when there's no light.
I'll hold you in my arms till dawn:
you'll kiss me to your heart's desire!"

47

One thing, my love, I'd say to you
were I but of your answer sure:
The reason for my silence is
that you are rich and I am poor.
- Oh, cast your doubts aside, young man!
To have no money is no disgrace:
The daughter of many a wealthy man
sleeps in a poor man's embrace!

48

The kiss that you have given me
upon the bidding of your heart
is sweeter far than any fruit
that grows on land or on the sea.
It is like that forbidden fruit
that Adam tasted from the Tree
and banished was from Paradise -
as you have banished me.

49

That night I slept
in my lonely bed.
My pearly skin
moonlight-overspread.
My lover came
to me in my dream -
I awoke: alone
in the moonlight's gleam.

50

One hour have I been away
and you've forgotten me already.
You thought: Now he has gone his way,
his feelings for me are not steady.
But I have not gone, you should know,
to that far place beyond return:
A thousand beauties would I spurn
for you: I shall not let you go.

51

My love, you're sleeping on your roof,
your breasts endow the stars with light.
Either invite me to your bed
or send me home and end my plight!
- I will not let you in to me
nor will I give you leave to go.
I must needs keep you in suspense
until the morning's rosy glow.

52.

I came on business to your house:
I saw you and forgot it.
My legs are paralysed, my head
is reeling: I'm besotted.
What witchcraft do you use on men,
that makes me slave to you?
I've been in love before - but now
I don't know what to do.

53.

O night, be long, be without end,
be, if you can, a year.
My love has come to me tonight,
at last I hold him near.
O dawn, delay, come not too soon,
do not disturb our sport.
The light that through my window falls
must cut our loving short.

54

As soon as sky and earth betrayed
the first hint of the day
My love slipped out of my embrace,
prepared to go away.
I tried to hold her back awhile,
I begged her to delay -
But she implored with anxious voice:
"I must - I cannot stay."

55

That night, more boundless than the sea,
I only spun two skeins of wool.
My thoughts were of my lover: then
I rose up from my spinning wheel,
And filled a pitcher with sweet wine
and went to my beloved's threshold:
"Open the door, my dearest heart,
It's snowing and my feet are cold!"

56

Your breasts are a snow-white cathedral,
your nipples eternal lamps.
Oh let me become your verger
and tend to your vernal lamps!
- Be off, you foolish young suitor,
my lamps to guard you're not fit;
You're fickle and quickly distracted:
you'd leave my cathedral unlit.

57

My love, if you'd permit me
to bare your beautiful breast,
to turn it into a garden,
come into it for rest -
I'd promise you on my honour
there would not be any disgrace,
And only the Angel of Death could
snatch me from your embrace.

58

Dark are your eyes, dark are your brows,
dark is your hair in ringlets tight:
The Lord will punish you, my love,
if you won't come to me tonight.
But if you come to me tonight
I'll lay my cheek against your cheek,
I'll lay my cheek against your cheek
while soul to soul in breathing speak.

59

Regard my love: all dressed in green,
her frock is like the spring,
Buttons and ribbons are all green,
no other colour to be seen.
I took her out into the woods:
a stream was tumbling down between
Green banks and all around the trees
arrayed in leaves of vernal green.

60

The artist seized his brush
her features to paint.
He got to her eyebrows
and dropped in a faint.
Those seeing the painting:
"Enchanting," they thought.
God himself made her beauty -
yet people will talk!

61

They took my beloved's portrait
to China as a treasure.
No matter where they showed it,
no girl could match her.
Six thousand five hundred painters
tried everything they knew -
But not one of them managed
the likeness of you.

62

I have not been to confession once
in all my living days.
Whenever I see a priest in the street
I turn the other way.
Whenever I see a pretty girl
I embrace her with devotion:
Her snow-white breast's my confessional,
in her arms is my absolution.

63

Oh let me drink your red cheeks' wine
till I have had my fill.
Your breasts are the Garden of Paradise,
let me pick your apples at will.
Oh let me rest on your snow-white breast
and sleep there while I draw breath,
And after an endless repose let me yield
my soul to the Angel of Death.

64

Oh let me love your beautiful face
that puts the Moon to shame.
Oh let me kiss your delicate lips
sweeter than sugar cane.
Your jet-black eyes, your eyebrows' waves
like the sea when the wind is blowing.
Your mouth is like a fragrant cup
with rose-water overflowing.

65

As I was walking down the lane
I saw an open door.
I stepped inside and saw my love,
a cup of wine before her.
"Drink up" I said, "drink to our love,
you know that I adore you:
And as you drain this loving cup
I'll lay my heart before you".

66

As I was walking down the lane
I saw some washing on a line.
Among the snow-white linen hung
a smock of delicate design:
The bodice patterned and the sleeves
embroidered blue and red as fire
Ah, this smock's owner must be mine!
Had I a thousand golden crowns I'd buy her!

67

White-breasted maid in your full skirt,
I touched your breasts today,
Your delicate arms, I clasped you tight
and, stunned, I drew away.
With folded hands I said this prayer:
"0 Lord, send me death's rest,
As beauty's victim let me die
upon this maiden's breast!"

68

"You are like a sapphire,
an emerald or jade,
Of thousand cups of attar
your breath is made."
"When you say such things my breast
yearns for you, my treasure.
Look, I'll undo the buttons:
come in and take your pleasure."

69

You're like a carving from the young
white wood of a sapling vine.
Like the petals of a royal rose
do your beautiful features shine.
I'm thirsting for your embraces
- let people whisper and smirk -
I'd be thirsting for your caresses
were you infidel, heathen or Turk!

70

Your small firm musk-melon breasts,
    when will they belong to me?
Your breasts are like the ocean:
    all fevers are cured by the sea.
Oh could I but grow smaller,
    plunge into your arms like the deep
And, stepping from the water,
    in the shade of your eyebrows find sleep!

71

A falcon on a red hand-line
        was hunting his prey in the day.
A partridge with colourful plumage
        alertly watched him at play.
The partridge said to the falcon:
        "Don't hunt me during the day,
I am no diurnal game bird -
        but catch me at night you may!"

72

Your eyes are such that one of them
sets me aflame, the other's conflagration.
Your eyebrows are the kind that will
lay low Shiraz to its foundations.
Whoever heard your golden voice
ring in Damascus or in Tyre
No longer looks upon the sun
but gazes on you with desire.

73

Your eyes are as the ocean
storm-tossed at Egypt's shore.
Your hair is as the waves
which the wind sets in motion.
As a willow you're slender,
as an apple pink-hued,
More beautiful than the rose,
yet with its perfume imbued.

74

Beloved, my beloved,
a silken cloth I'll spread
And cushions partridge-patterned
set on my gold-weave bed.
Here shall we wine and dine, love.
I'll wear my sheerest garment
- as for no other guests -
So through the silken tissue
you'll see my silken breasts.

75

I'm as firm as a rock,
hard as steel forged cold,
As high as a cloud
no man can enfold.
My man must wield pine bow
strung with wolfskin, and be bold
Enough to be the scion
of the heroes of old.

76

I am a wild bird.
Hold me if you can.
I'll fly off, I'll join some other flock.
You'll come and try to lure me back again.
You'll build a golden cage for me
to trap me in the captive life I knew.
You'll call upon the world to plead your case -
but you can never bring me back to you.

77

That morning at daybreak
the water sang in the rivulet.
But the voice of my loved one
was more beautiful yet,
Those whose love lacks passion
do not sleep together.
They exchange but one kiss
to guard and keep together.

78

My love, do you know
I came to you at night?
I found you asleep
and kissed you a thousand times.
I don't know if you slept
or just pretended,
taking pity on a young man,
letting him kiss you till the night was ended.

79

Whenever I look on other girls
I do not wish to wrong them -
They all are but attendant stars:
you are the Moon among them.
On New Year's Day men wish each other
a happy holiday:
Today's like a thousand holidays
for you have come my way.

80

God made you beautiful, my love.
    Blessed be the mother who bore you.
Not the Moon, not the Sun when it rises
    can stand up before you.
You are like Saturn that appears
    each morning - then at night
Moves over to the land of Greece
    to divide the darkness from the light.

81

Go, Moon, to my beloved
    and of my love remind her.
- How can I remind her of your love?
    I don't know where to find her.
- Float up over the city:
    there's a high wall and a tree,
And under it, with a pale-blue cup,
    drinking sweet wine, sits she.
Drinking and singing a hayren:
    "Love and wine - what ecstasy..."

82

O Moon, high up in the heavens,
where will you float this night?
You look into many windows,
many a beauty sleeps in your sight.
My love has undone her top buttons,
between her breasts falls your light
Which is cast back by the night sky
to make the stars less bright.

83

I am young and you are young -
now is the time for love.
Your figure is as a yew-bow,
responding to my touch.
Your breast is as a garden,
your nipples are as vines.
Your breast is as the dawn: the more
I unveil it the more it shines.

84

To be a gossamer-weave smock -
silken buttons, thread of gold -
To embrace the whole of your body,
your neck to enfold -
To be the water in your cup
or garnet wine from the South:
You'd raise a precious goblet up -
I'd spill over and kiss your mouth.

85

Among the reed-banks a young cane -
yourself - sways in the breeze.
You have the shapely slenderness
and beauty of cypress-trees.
The fount of immortality,
they say, springs from your breast:
I envy him who may lie there,
enjoying refreshment and rest.

86

You came for water to our spring
and from your breast the Moon rolled down
And fell into the spring -
O beautiful young thing!
I envy him
who slept with you all night,
Kissed the orb of your mouth
and held you tight.

87

I saw my love in the street
and called to the other side:
"What's the price of a kiss?"
She turned her head and replied:
"If my kiss could be bought
I'd never kiss a man!
But if you love me, come
and kiss me all you can!"

88

Cut up this pomegranate here
and count the pips inside it.
For every pip I want a kiss -
not one more, I've decided!
- Leave me alone, you foolish boy,
I thought you had more sense:
For every pip you want a kiss?
Why, the number would be immense!

89

They came and brought me news:
"Your love is coming this way".
Let us go out and meet her
and wish her a happy day.
We'll kiss her rose-red features,
than all the world more pure,
Shake the dust off her shoes and place it
on our eyes as a miracle cure.

90

I made the stupidest mistake:
    I asked a plain girl for a kiss.
At once the plain girl put on airs:
    "My reputation is at stake!"
But from a window called a pretty lass:
    "Why waste your time on one so plain?
Come, ask a pretty maiden for a kiss:
    she knows the worth of a young swain!"

91

They came and brought me news:
        "Your lover's become a monk."
I was startled and trembled all over:
        how could he become a monk!
His palate's accustomed to sugar -
        how could he now eat peas!
His skin is used to fine linen -
        how could a hair-shirt give ease!

92

The full Moon said to me:
I resemble your rover.
- Shame on you, Moon! In what
do you resemble my rover?
My rover has eyes dark and bold,
dark eyebrows and a handsome mouth,
Dark-red and well-shaped lips he has
and a moustache like threads of gold.

93

I was the seedling of a peach,
among stones and rock did I grow.
They pulled me up and transplanted me
to a far-away alien row.
They make fine sugar-water
and drench me from head to toe -
Oh, carry me back to my homeland,
feed me on melting snow!

94

Sing me one of the many hayrens
that you know so well by heart.
Sing of our own day, of people
now living: practise the art
Of putting your words into verses -
but of no man must you speak ill.
You know that I have been a wanderer,
and at heart am a wanderer still!

95

Her wayward son a mother cursed:
- A wanderer you shall be, my son,
Tread foreign paths in foreign lands,
an outcast whom all people shun.
Stones hard and cold shall be your bed,
on sandy ground you'll rest your head.
Before the dawn your day shall start -
and God the sole hope in your heart!

96

If any man offend a wanderer
let him be cast out from his home.
Let him depart to foreign countries,
the roads of exile there to roam.
Though gold like rain may fall upon him,
a shower of riches from above -
Such gold is worthless in the face of
his separation from his love.

97

I took the world between my hands -
a mirror cracked from end to end -
I turned my gaze away: I found
not one to call my friend.
The people of our present age
are wicked and uncouth:
Malice and slander are their trade
and lies are now the truth.

98

My soul left my body,
I sat down to lament:
"My soul, if you leave me
my life is spent!"
And my soul replied:
"Where is your wisdom, pray?
When a house is collapsing
why should its master stay?"

99

The man who thinks his lot is wretched:
the world's convulsions burn him up,
Sugar tastes bitter to his palate
and bitterness spills from his cup.
Cold water to him burns like fire,
the candle's flame disturbs his mind:
Contentment is an unfulfilled desire
and peace he cannot find.

100

At every hour and at every minute
Lord, save me from the wickedness of man!
His wickedness has grown to such a limit
even the beasts avoid it if they can.
The king of animals, the lion,
has to be kept in chains -
The eagle circles high above
the earth which it disdains.

101

-I asked a sage
why God made the soul
And put it in the body,
an earthly cage?
- I think he made it
to uplift the earthly mould,
And in it he laid it
to adorn it like gold.

NAHAPET KUCHAK

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